Running head: ENSURING VALUE-BASED DECISION MAKING

Ensuring Value-Based Decision Making

by Austin Fire Department Members

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: _____

Abstract

The Austin Fire Department (AFD) expects its members to act ethically and uphold the traditional values of the fire service. To accomplish this, AFD identified seven values for members to utilize when making decisions to ensure that their actions meet expectations. The problem was that AFD could not ensure that its members will make decisions that are consistent with the values of the department. The purpose of this research was to identify methods for ensuring that AFD members will make decisions that are consistent with the values of the department.

The descriptive research method was used to answer three research questions. How well do the members of AFD agree with the department's values? What are the current practices utilized by AFD members for making decisions consistent with AFD values? What methods do AFD members believe could be employed to ensure that members make decisions consistent with the AFD values?

A survey of AFD members was conducted to provide data to answer the research questions. The results indicated that many members of the department strongly agree with the department values because they are similar to their personal values. Also indicated was a need for training on decision making, specifically value-based decision making. To achieve the goal of ensuring that AFD members will make decisions that are consistent with the values of the department, recommendations were made to clearly communicate the values to the members, implement a values training program, provide guidelines for value-based decision making and to address the perception that the members of the AFD upper management are not role models for making decisions consistent with the AFD values.

Table of Contents

Appendices

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Introduction

Individuals make decisions based on what they value (Thiroux & Krasemann, 2009). Fire fighters are expected to make decisions consistent with the traditional fire service values such as integrity, courage and moral character (International Fire Service Training Association [IFSTA], 2008). The Austin Fire Department (AFD) has identified specific values for its members to utilize to make decisions. AFD communicates these chosen values through the distribution and posting of the Austin Fire Department Values document. These values are further delineated in the AFD policy manual that lists specific expectations for actions taken by members of the department. The problem is that AFD cannot ensure that its members will make decisions that are consistent with the values of the department.

The purpose of this research is to identify methods for ensuring that AFD members will make decisions that are consistent with the values of the department. This research project will use the descriptive research method to answer the following questions: How well do the members of AFD agree with the department's values? What are the current practices utilized by AFD members for making decisions consistent with AFD values? What methods do AFD members believe could be employed to ensure that members make decisions consistent with the AFD values?

Background and Significance

AFD is a large metropolitan emergency services organization serving the citizens who live in Austin, the capitol city of the state of Texas. The department currently operates 44 fire

stations plus an aircraft firefighting station at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. Over 1000 fire fighters and 60 civilians are currently employed by AFD. Each year, AFD responds to approximately 70,000 emergency incidents. Of these incidents, approximately 65 to 70 percent are medical incidents (City of Austin, n.d.).

The mission of AFD is the preservation of life and property. The goals for AFD are: (a) deliver comprehensive safety services of the highest quality, (b) support and maintain a safe, healthy, well-trained and high performing workforce, (c) provide high-quality first responder service as part of an integrated emergency medical care system, (d) be community resources for life safety knowledge and information about AFD services, (e) attract and retain a qualified and diverse workforce and (f) be accountable to our community for demonstrable results (City of Austin, n.d.).

To accomplish this mission and meet these goals, AFD must hire and retain employees that accept these concepts. New AFD fire fighters are introduced to the values of the department on the first day of training in the cadet academy. The AFD cadet manual (2008) specifically lists the AFD values, which are:

Loyalty – Bear true faith and allegiance to the citizens you serve, AFD, your unit, and fellow fire fighters.

Duty – Fulfill your obligations.

Respect – Treat people as they should be treated.

Selfless Service – Put the welfare of the citizens you serve, AFD, and your subordinates before your own.

Honor – Live up to all AFD values.

Integrity – Do what's right, legally and morally.

Personal Courage – Face fear, danger, or adversity (physical or moral) (p. 1).

The department also provides ethics and values training included in the professional development program for members promoting to the officer level. However, even with the stated AFD values and the training provided to inform AFD fire fighters of the expectations for their behavior, there is an unfortunate pattern of decisions and actions being taken by department members that are inconsistent with the AFD values.

In May of 2008, a lieutenant was indefinitely suspended from the department for neglect of duty. This lieutenant delayed the emergency response to a person in respiratory distress for two minutes while he obtained food (Newton, 2008). These actions are inconsistent with the AFD values of duty, loyalty and selfless service. Department officials stated that the actions of this lieutenant showed a failure of leadership and supervisory judgment (Newton, 2008). Shortly afterwards, in June of 2008, another lieutenant was indefinitely suspended from the department for lewd conduct and inappropriate use of language. These actions included watching pornography while on duty, using department email for messages of a sexual nature and having a discussion with a coworker concerning a situation in which he believed that he would rape a woman (News 8, 2008). These actions are obviously inconsistent with the AFD values of respect, honor and integrity.

Poor decision making and performing actions inconsistent with the AFD values are not limited to just officers within the department. In September of 2008, the department began investigating 36 members for accessing pornographic websites on city computers (World Net Daily, 2008). Only a few months later, in January of 2009, one cadet was terminated for being arrested on burglary charges and another for public intoxication (Plohetski, 2009).

All of these incidents began with a decision to perform an action that was inconsistent with the AFD values. Even one poor decision can hurt the department's reputation in the community and can cause the public to question the department's ability to provide service. A chief officer describing the citizens' expectation of AFD stated, "when a citizen calls 911 and requests emergency help, that citizen rightfully expects emergency personnel to drop everything and to respond immediately, quick response is our core duty to the citizens; it is our job number one" (Newton, 2008). The lieutenant who delayed emergency response clearly violated the public's trust and hurt the reputation of the department.

Citizens must also be able to trust their fire fighters. Often in the direst of circumstances, citizens open their homes to fire fighters and allow them access to their loved ones and most treasured possessions. These citizens must trust the decision making of the fire fighters and believe that they will act in accordance with the AFD values. In the case of the lieutenant who acted lewd and inappropriate, an AFD chief officer stated that the public should not feel comfortable with a member of the department who would act in this manner and further described the lieutenant's actions as a disgrace (News 8, 2008). Likewise, the AFD cadet who was terminated for burglary may cause citizens to believe that they can no longer trust fire fighters.

In addition to the loss of trust and respect from the community, members who do not perform their duties consistently with the department values place legal liability on the department. Courts can order a fire department to pay a significant amount of money for actions taken by a member including neglect of duty and sexual harassment. For example, a jury recently awarded 6.2 million dollars to a female fire fighter in the Los Angeles Fire Department who was harassed because of her race and sexual orientation (Tong, 2007).

This research is important for AFD because the department has recently suffered loss of respect and public embarrassment from these incidents of members making poor decisions. The intent of this research is to identify methods to ensure that members make decisions consistent with the AFD values. These methods can then be utilized to prevent members from making similar poor decisions in the future. This would prevent the discipline and loss of employment for members and improve the reputation of the department. Ultimately, the mission and goals of the department will be better achieved by identifying and employing methods for ensuring that department members make decisions according to the AFD values.

This research directly relates to the terminal objective listed in the Executive Development course Unit 8: Ethics and Change, which states "Apply an ethical decision-making model to solve an ethical dilemma in a given situation" (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2006, p. SM 8-1). In addition, this research is consistent with two of the United States Fire Administration operational objectives; Objective 3.1: Improve the Nation's incident decision-making skills and Objective 4.1: Enhance the professionalism of the Nation's fire and emergency service leaders.

<center>Literature Review</center>

All too frequently, unethical behavior is the cause of organizational problems. Fire service organizations are not exempt. Unethical behaviors of fire service members can lead to many negative consequences for an organization. In addition, these unethical behaviors are often reported by the media furthering the damage to the organization. For this reason, ethics and ethical behavior of their members should be a high priority for all fire service organizations (Ward, 2006). Ethics is the study of human behavior and the attempt to determine what is right and what is wrong. From an individual point of view, ethics directly relates to the individual's

character. Character is primarily determined by what that particular individual values, or in other words, by their values (Thiroux & Krasemann, 2009).

Values can be defined as moral concepts that help people make decisions and plan actions. An individual learns values from family, friends, education, religion and the workplace. These values are the primary basis for choices in one's behavior (Stowell, 2007). Wallace (2006) describes values, as it pertains to the fire service, as the fundamental appropriate behaviors which can be "organized into a philosophy of operations" (p. 76). When determining organizational values, the impact of personal values must be considered. Most importantly, values are enduring. It is very difficult to change a long-held personal value. Next, values tend to be consistent. Organizational values that are inconsistent with personal values will cause the individual to ignore or exclude that organizational value. Finally, values are emotionally charged. Personal values are often accompanied by strong emotions. These emotions can prevent the acceptance of values that are different (Stowell, 2007).

From the start of their career in the fire service, all fire cadets are taught that they must have certain values to be successful as a fire fighter. These values include integrity, courage and moral character. Members of the public and coworkers depend on fire fighters upholding these values. This is what earns a community's trust and respect for their fire department. Violation of this trust by one member reflects badly on the whole department (IFSTA, 2008). There is nothing more important to the public's opinion of a fire fighter than their honesty, truthfulness and personal integrity. When these values are not upheld, the tarnished reputation can often impair the effectiveness of a fire service organization (Buckman, 2006). Clearly, the status of the fire service in the eyes of the public is directly related to upholding these values. Former Fire Chief James Page (2002) explains that the public trust and adoration for the values of fire

fighters was earned by the many lives of fire fighters lost in the line of duty. According to Chief

Page, "If you call yourself a fire fighter and you're not willing to risk your life to save a stranger,

turn in your badge" (p. 168).

However, while conducting research for an applied research project for the National Fire

Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program, Blackley (2002) found that the members of the

Wilmington Fire Department in North Carolina had significant differences in values. This was

demonstrated by the inconsistency of the members' choices of which action should be taken in

ethically challenging scenarios. Blackley attributed the choices inconsistent with the

departmental values to generational value differences and the dissimilar perspective of members

based on their rank.

As indicated by Blackley's research, each person has developed their own set of

individual values based on their upbringing and past life experiences. Yet, it is important for all

members of an organization to be able to commit to a common set of values. Wallace (2006)

recommends that fire departments conduct a values audit. This is a process that can be used to

identify the core values held by the members of the department. The audit should be conducted

from the individual level all the way up to the top of the organization. It is also appropriate to

consider the values of other stakeholders that are not employees of the department such as a city

manager or mayor. The values that are cited the most or rated the highest by the audit

participants can be used as the core of the department's values system.

AFD has selected values for the organization. These values are loyalty, duty, respect,

selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. The department expects all members to

protect these values and hold each other to the highest standards. Furthermore, it is these values

that should be the basis for all decisions made by members of the department. (City of Austin, n.d.).

Decision making can be defined as the process of evaluating options to choose the best possible outcome. These choices are based on a value system. An individual considers each situation, often subconsciously, and makes decisions consistent with their personal values (Ward, 2006). From a neurobiological perspective, value-based decision making is pervasive in nature. Rangel et al. (2008) presents a three tiered value system for making decisions. The first and most basic level is the Pavlovian system which values evolutionary response to environmental stimuli. The second level is the habit system which assigns values to learned responses. The highest level is the goal directed system in which the value is determined by evaluating the rewards associated with particular actions. For a given situation, the action that is valued the highest will initially be chosen. However, through experience and training it is possible to learn to differently compute the values so that a better decision is made.

There is much literature written about decision-making theory and decision-making models. Most of this information can be categorized as rational decision-making theory. This means that the decision making followed logical steps to achieve the best decision (Klein, 2004). Most rational decision-making models contain similar steps such as: classify the problem, define the problem, list alternative options, determine best response, convert decision into action and test the action against desired outcome (Ward, 2006). A decision model such as this can be utilized to assist with making decisions consistent with values because the step of determining the best response allows for contemplation of the alternative actions available and their relationship to the individual or organizational values.

However, a criticism of the rational decision-making theory is its limited application to situations that occur in real life. This is especially true for those in the fire service. For most emergency situations, there is not enough time to follow the rational decision-making model. In these high-stress, time-critical situations, decisions are instead based on actions taken in the past that proved successful. This can also be described as acting on intuition or a gut feeling (Launder, n.d.).

Klein (1999) conducted extensive research that supports the relatively new concept called recognition-primed decision making. The purpose of Klein's research was to determine how people use their experience to make decisions in field settings. Fire ground commanders were one group of professionals studied. Klein discovered that fire ground commanders did not follow the rational decision-making model for making their decisions in the naturalistic setting. This means that the commanders did not follow the process of identifying options and using a system to choose the best one. Instead, the commanders used their experience to identify one option. This option was then evaluated using mental simulation. If this option was determined to produce a successful outcome by the commander, that option was chosen without ever considering another option. If the option was determined not to produce a successful outcome, then that option was discarded and the process started again. At no point were two options compared side by side for advantages and disadvantages. Klein estimates that as much as eighty percent of decisions made by fire ground commanders use the recognition-primed decision model instead of the rational decision model.

No matter what decision-making model is being utilized, there is almost always a step that includes checking the decision against values. Blount (2002) explains how the United States Army values are very important for the decision making of their officers. Daily, Army officers

face situations that require value-based decisions. For example, the officers that guard prisoners of war must treat them according to military procedures. This may often conflict with their own personal feeling concerning the prisoners and the groups to which they belong. The Army value of integrity is displayed by officers who chose to follow the rules instead of acting out their own wishes.

Decision making in the fire service is very similar. Every action made by a fire fighter is preceded by one or more decisions. From the simplest decision, such as whether or not to don protective equipment, to the most complex decision, such as how to fight a fire with victims trapped, the actions taken are a result of decisions. One method for fire service decision making recommended by Carter (2008) includes the use of decision guidelines. Using decision guidelines will enhance decision-making ability because they will structure the process to include experience, education and common sense. Carter presents several decision guidelines for specific decision types such as incident command, fire prevention, management of financial resources and fire service personnel management. Each of these specific decision guidelines includes a short purpose statement followed by questions to ensure all of the relevant issues are considered.

Although AFD has chosen organizational values, the department's policy manual does not contain any specific guidelines for utilizing these values for decision making. AFD General Order F06 Fire Station Management (2008) states that station officers have the responsibility to make decisions for the activities allowed at their station. It further gives battalion chiefs the responsibility to make decisions regarding station management "according to department policy" (p. 6). There is no mention of methods that may be utilized to ensure value-based decision making by station officers or battalion chiefs.

AFD General Order H37 Code of Conduct (2008) lists many actions that are violations of the code of conduct such as insubordination, refusal to obey an order, threats of violence or fighting, unauthorized possession of weapons, theft, neglect of duty, destruction of property and use or possession of illegal drugs on or off duty. The code of conduct policy does not contain any reference to the department values or guidelines for making decisions according to these values.

However, there are other guidelines in the policy manual that are intended to simplify the decision-making process during stressful situations. AFD General Order A01 Fireground Operations (2008) contains guidelines for making fire ground decisions. It begins with the overall incident priorities of life safety, incident stabilization and property conservation. These priorities are further broken down into strategic objectives of rescue, exposures, confinement, extinguishment, overhaul, ventilation and salvage. The acronym of RECEO VS is used to assist in the memorization and recall of these strategic objectives.

Wallace (2006) explains that there is a difference between a value-driven organization and a rule-driven organization. Many fire departments are rule driven. This means they have developed a large set of policies that are expected to ensure the members make the correct decision by following the written policies. However, it is impossible to write a policy to cover every situation and every decision that must be made. In an attempt to do so, some organizations have created a policy manual that contains so many rules that it is beyond the ability of the employees to remember them all. In contrast, a value-driven organization does not attempt to write a policy for all situations. Instead, these organizations provide their employees with a set of shared common values. When faced with decisions, employees have the freedom to make their own decision as long as it meets the organizational values. In this type of organization, there is more flexibility and therefore employees are better able to utilize their knowledge, skills and

abilities. Buckman (2006) describes organizational values as shared standards and core beliefs that guide decisions and actions within an organization. He further describes the advantages to all stakeholders when the department members' values are in accord with the organizational values. These advantages include a high level of dedication and commitment, a well-disciplined workforce, an atmosphere of teamwork and cooperation and a strong sense of all members contributing to the success of the organization.

Besides the fire service, many other organizations strive to achieve the value-driven organization status. In fact, Arena (2007) has found that some organizations are successful because of the higher purpose of the company. These companies endeavor for corporate responsibility not just for profits. The higher purpose of the company is achieved by the daily practice of the corporate values. However, many companies have stated values but very few actually internalize and operate according to their values. This is the difference between a company that successfully achieves a higher purpose and those that do not. The notion that a company, whose main goal is to make a profit, should focus on ethics and values and not the financial bottom line is fairly new. According to Wenning & Fulton (2007), one reason for this recent attention to ethics is the proliferation of news and information readily available from the Internet. In other words, how a company or its employees behave will eventually be discovered and made public information. Therefore, Wenning and Fulton believe that the secret to ethical conduct is transparency. The best way for a company to prove that it is upholding the values it set forth is to let outsiders confirm it for themselves.

When considering methods utilized for ensuring members of an organization make decisions and act according to the chosen values, the adoption of a code of ethics is common practice. The purpose of a code of ethics is to inform the members of the organization of the

common set of values and encourage them to live by these values. If the members abide by the code of ethics, the reputation and integrity of the organization will be protected because all members are behaving as expected (Bruegman, 2009). A code of ethics is intended to be a guide and reference to help clarify the organization's mission, values, and principles (Buckman, 2006). One such code of ethics was developed and adopted by the International Association of Fire Chiefs. This code of ethics clearly states which actions and decisions are acceptable for a fire chief and which are not. The code includes statements such as "recognize that we serve in a position of public trust that imposes responsibility to use publicly owned resources effectively and judiciously", "seek no favor and accept no form of personal reward for influence or official action" and "handle all personnel matters on the basis of merit" (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2008). According to Bruegman (2009), it is not enough for an organization to just post their code of conduct on a wall. These values must be living within the organization and represented in the actions of all members especially those at the highest levels.

While researching how everyday businesses become breakthrough companies and exhibit extraordinary performance, McFarland (2008) found that focusing on company character was more important than values. Some of the breakthrough companies had chosen organization values and some had not. However, all of the breakthrough companies lined up their company goals with the way their people acted. In other words, values refer to what a company says they believe; character refers to how their people really behave. McFarland further discovered the significance of the company leaders acting consistent with the company character expectations. The quickest way to be removed from power in a breakthrough company is to act in a manner that undermines the character of the company.

Buckman (2006) also believes that for organizational values to be successful in a fire department, the fire chief must model the values and behaviors that are expected. The fire chief, as the credible leader of the organization, must be beyond reproach concerning the values in order to hold the other members accountable. Much of the literature written concerning the methods for ensuring value-based decision making in the fire service supports the belief that the organizational leaders must set the example.

Additional methods have also been employed with the goal of ensuring individuals make choices consistent with the organizational values. Ward (2006) recommends hiring employees that share the values of the organization, conducting performance appraisals that reward behavior consistent with the values and implementing a values training program. Klein (1999) recommends the use of decision-making exercises and scenarios. This type of program can be as valuable as actual experiences. Another type of training program recommended by Klein is the compilation of stories that demonstrate the decision-making process used in difficult situations. Bruegman (2009) believes that organizations must train their employees on translating the organizational values into specific actions. He further suggests rewarding employees that best live up to the values and addressing those who do not.

In summary, the findings of the literature review provided direction for the research methods used for this project. A survey was developed for AFD members to evaluate their agreement with the AFD values and to determine the decision-making methods currently utilized. Questions were designed to determine if the value-based decision making of AFD members was consistent with the information found in the literature review. For example, a survey question was included to determine if AFD members had received training methods for making decisions consistent with the AFD values. Other survey questions were designed to

measure the agreement of AFD members with the chosen AFD values as indications of how likely they would be to make decisions consistent with those values. Furthermore, survey questions were written to compare the use of the rational decision-making model and the recognition-primed decision-making model for making decisions in different circumstances.

<center>Procedures</center>

Using the descriptive research method, a survey (Appendix A) of the members of AFD was utilized to obtain information to answer the first two research questions; "how well do the members of AFD agree with the department's values" and "what are the current practices utilized by AFD members for making decisions consistent with AFD values." Then, to identify possible solutions to the third research question; "what methods do AFD members believe could be employed to ensure that members make decisions consistent with AFD values," an open-ended question was included at the end of the survey for respondents to provide additional comments and recommendations for methods that may be used to improve the value-based decision making of department members. The purpose of the survey was to not only gather data that would answer the research questions but also allow for a comparison with the information obtained during the literature review.

The questions for the survey were written by the author. The AFD special projects battalion chief reviewed the survey questions and recommended minor revisions. The survey questions were then modified to address the issues raised by the review. The final version of the survey consisted of ten closed-ended multiple choice questions. Two of these questions also provided the opportunity for additional comments. The survey also contained a final open-ended question that solicited any additional information that the survey taker wished to include.

The survey questions were developed to identify the following; the familiarity the members have with AFD values, the amount of agreement concerning the importance of AFD values and the differences in value-based decision making in different situations including the differences in value-based decision making when using a rational decision-making model compared to a recognition-primed decision-making model.

A final review of the survey was conducted by the AFD executive team on August 7th, 2009. After the survey was reviewed and discussed, the fire chief approved the survey for distribution to the department. An information bulletin (Appendix B) was released on August 7th, 2009 informing AFD members of the survey and encouraging all members to complete the survey. Within a few hours of the release of the survey, questions arose from individuals seeking clarification if this survey was also meant to include AFD civilian employees. The individuals that asked this question were answered by email. The answer provided was yes, this survey was meant for all members which does include civilian employees. The survey was closed on August 31st, 2009.

The total population for the survey was all members of AFD. The opportunity to take the survey was offered to the total population. However, because the survey was voluntary, all of the total population did not actually take the survey. Of the approximately 1100 members of AFD, 354 members accessed the survey web site. The survey was fully completed by 288 members. The web site surveymonkey.com was used to conduct the survey. A link to the survey web site was included in the information bulletin released to the department. There was no method used to identify the survey takers. The anonymity of the survey was intended to encourage freedom of feedback without the fear of retribution.

Limitations of the procedures used for this applied research project do exist. The

procedures for the survey could not prevent multiple entries being made by one person. There

was no method to verify each survey was taken by a different person. This could skew the results

of the survey. Also, because the survey was completely voluntary, there is no process to

determine if the results correspond to a fair representation of all the different groups within the

department such as seniority groups, rank, gender and race.

Results

Using the descriptive research method, this author was able to obtain useful information

to answer all three research questions.

Research question one: "How well do the members of the Austin Fire Department agree with the

department's values?"

The survey of AFD department members contained questions for which the results

provided data to determine how well the members agree with the department's values. Survey

question number three asked members to rate the AFD values according to a scale of not

important, somewhat important, important, very important and no opinion. The results for this

survey question are shown in Table 1. To summarize this data, a member could be considered to

agree with the value if a rating of important or very important was selected. Conversely, a

member could be considered to not agree with the value if a rating of not important was selected.

If the somewhat important or no opinion choice was selected, the member could be considered to

neither agree nor disagree with the value. The percentage of survey respondents rating the values

as important or very important are: 94 percent for integrity, 93 percent for duty, 92 percent for

respect, 89 percent for courage, 89 percent for honor, 85 percent for loyalty and 84 percent for

selfless service. Overall, 90 percent of the respondents rated the AFD values overall as important

or very important. Only 3 percent rated the AFD values as not important.

Table 1

Results for Survey Question Three

Please rate the importance of each AFD value. (You must give a rating to each of the

values to successfully complete this question. The comments section is optional.)

	No Opinion	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
Loyalty	4.6% (15)	4.6% (15)	5.2% (17)	30.9% (101)	54.7% (179)
Duty	2.8% (9)	2.4% (8)	1.5% (5)	21.7% (71)	71.6% (234)
Respect	3.1% (10)	2.4% (8)	2.1% (7)	25.1% (82)	67.3% (220)
Selfless Service	3.4% (11)	4.6% (15)	8.0% (26)	28.7% (94)	55.4% (181)
Honor	4.6% (15)	3.4% (11)	3.4% (11)	29.4% (96)	59.3% (194)
Integrity	3.1% (10)	2.1% (7)	1.2% (4)	12.8% (42)	80.7% (264)
Personal Courage	2.8% (9)	2.8% (9)	5.5% (18)	30.9% (101)	58.1% (190)

Note. The number in the parentheses indicates the number of respondents that selected that

answer choice.

Many respondents also provided additional comments for this survey question that

indicate strong agreement with AFD values. These comments include, "that is the duty of a fire

fighter", "if our fire fighters do not have these values, they should not be here", "these values are

important and come naturally to most AFD fire fighters" and "my personal values are consistent with the seven AFD values."

Survey results for questions four, five and six can also be used to measure members' agreement with the AFD values. These three questions asked members to rate how often they make decisions consistent with the AFD values. The survey contained questions of this type for three circumstances; decisions made on emergency scenes, decisions made during non-emergency time at the fire station and decisions made when off duty. The respondents rated how often they made decisions consistent with the AFD values using the scale of never, sometimes, usually, most of the time and not sure or not applicable. The results for these three survey questions are shown in Table 2. To summarize the data for these questions, a member could be considered to agree with the value if a rating of usually, most of the time or always was selected. Conversely, a member could be considered to not agree with the value if a rating of never was selected. If the sometimes or not sure/not applicable choices were selected, the member could be considered to neither agree nor disagree with the value. The percentage of survey respondents who answered usually, most of the time or always when asked how often they make decisions consistent with AFD values was 90 percent for non-emergency time at the fire station, 86 percent for when off duty and 87 percent for during an emergency incident. Overall, the respondents indicated that they make decisions that indicate agreement with AFD values approximately 89 percent of the time. This overall agreement percentage may be slightly higher if the respondents who chose not applicable were not included in the calculation. For example, civilian members of the department would have selected not applicable for decision making on the emergency scene. This does not necessarily mean that they do not agree with the AFD values.

Table 2

Results for Survey Questions Four, Five and Six

I make decisions that are consistent with AFD values….			
	during emergency incidents.	during non-emergency time at the station/office.	while off duty.
Not sure/not applicable	10.9% (34)	5.4% (17)	6.1% (19)
Never	1.9% (6)	1.3% (4)	2.6% (8)
Sometimes	0.0% (0)	2.9% (9)	3.8% (12)
Usually	4.2% (13)	7.7% (24)	12.1% (38)
Most of the time	29.7% (93)	45.0% (141)	50.2% (157)
Always	53.4% (167)	37.7% (118)	25.2% (79)

Note. The number in the parentheses indicates the number of respondents that selected that answer choice.

There were also additional comments entered into the survey that provided more data concerning the members' agreement with the AFD values. There is indication of confusion concerning which values are actually the official values of the department. One respondent commented that an AFD Values plaque on a fire station wall listed different values than the values that were presented in the survey. Another respondent commented that these values could not be found anywhere on the department's intranet web site. For some members, these AFD values were completely unknown. One respondent commented, "I wasn't even aware these values were in place or existed…they are new to me as of today." Also, some respondents

indicated that they agreed with the concept of the current AFD values but preferred other words

be used such as honesty, caring, accountability, and professionalism.

Although the survey results indicate that a majority of the members believe the AFD

values to be important and most often make decisions consistent with these values, there were

many comments suggesting that not all members of the department act according to the values.

The majority of these comments illustrate a perception that the chief officers in the upper

management of the department do not act in accordance with the AFD values. These comments

include statements such as "there are two sets of values, the written values and the ones

command staff follows", "I would like to see the command staff lead by example", "the

executive level of AFD management does not reflect AFD values" and "these values are

preached by command staff but not necessarily practiced."

Finally, there were a few members who disagreed with the concept of department values

and teaching people to make decisions consistent with stated values. One respondent commented

that "the idea of company values is outdated." Another respondent stated that "to try and teach

these values to someone who doesn't have them is impossible." A different respondent agreed

with this sentiment and commented that training on values was silly.

Research question two: "What are the current practices utilized by Austin Fire Department

members for making decisions consistent with Austin Fire Department values?"

The survey of AFD department members contained several questions that provided data

to determine what current practices are utilized by AFD members for making decisions. Survey

question number one asked if the member was able to state the seven AFD values from memory;

80 percent of the respondents answered no and 12 percent answered yes. These results indicate

that only a small percentage of the department members use memorization of the AFD values as a method to ensure decision making consistent with these values.

Survey question number two asked if the members had received training on making decisions consistent with the AFD values. The answer choices were none, a little, some, a lot and not sure. Approximately 60 percent of the respondents answered that they had little to no training on how to make decisions consistent with the AFD values. Additionally, almost 15 percent of the respondents indicated that they were not sure if they had received any training of this type. Only 25 percent said that they had received either some or a lot training on value-based decision making. This indicates that the members believe that the department does not have a successful training program that provides members with methods for making decisions consistent with the AFD values. This conclusion is further supported by the lack of any department training practices for decision making cited in the additional comments section of the survey.

Three survey questions were designed to compare the methods of decision making used in three types of circumstances; on emergency scenes, at the station and off duty. Questions seven, eight and nine asked if members consciously utilized the AFD values before making decisions in these circumstances. The following statement, used to introduce these questions, was added for clarity: "The statements on this page will assess how often you consciously utilize the AFD values when making a decision. This is different from just making a decision consistent with AFD values in that you must consciously delay your decision making until you think about the AFD values and then make your decision." The results for these three survey questions are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Results for Survey Questions Seven, Eight and Nine

I consciously utilize the AFD values before making a decision…		
	during emergency incidents.	during non-emergency time at the station/office.	while off duty.
Not sure/not applicable	23.2% (70)	15.6% (47)	15.6% (47)
Never	22.2% (67)	21.2% (64)	23.2% (70)
Sometimes	10.9% (33)	11.9% (36)	13.6% (41)
Usually	7.9% (24)	11.3% (34)	12.6% (38)
Most of the time	14.2% (43)	18.5% (56)	20.5% (62)
Always	21.5% (65)	21.5% (65)	14.6% (44)

Note. The number in the parentheses indicates the number of respondents that selected that answer choice.

As previously discussed, 89 percent of the respondents stated that they made decisions consistent with the AFD values in these types of situations. Survey questions seven, eight and nine were designed to determine if the members were making these decisions rationally or not. In other words, were they consciously aware of their options and intentionally choosing the one that most closely aligned with the AFD values or were these decisions more often made subconsciously? The results of these three survey questions do not indicate a clear pattern for the use of either methods of decision making, conscious or subconscious in the different circumstances. For example, 22 percent of the respondents said that they never consciously

utilize the AFD values before making a decision during an emergency incident. The same

amount of respondents, 22 percent, stated that they always consciously utilize the AFD values

before making a decision during an emergency incident. Similar results occurred for the question

about conscious decision making during non-emergency time with 21 percent indicating that

they always do and 21 percent also indicating that they never do.

These findings are supported by the results of survey question number ten which

indicated the use of both types of methods. Question ten asked the members to describe any

method they utilized to ensure that they make decisions consistent with the AFD values. Of the

respondent comments entered for this question, 46 percent indicated that they act consistent with

AFD values because they have similar personal values. These members believe they don't need

to consciously utilize the AFD values for decision making because their personal values are

ingrained into their subconscious decision making. Comments supporting this belief include; "I

don't go down a mental checklist of the values when making a decision", "they (the values) are

part of who I am", "these values come naturally" and "decisions are a natural by-product of

ingrained core values."

However, 28 percent of the respondents indicated that they use some sort of logical

decision-making process to ensure they make decisions consistent with the AFD values. These

respondents described using an accepted standard as a guide for making decisions. These

standards include "what the bible teaches", "the boy scout code of honor" and "would I want this

reported in the newspaper". Also, several respondents cited personal examples of role models for

their decision making. These role models include "Jesus", "Mom", "bosses" and specifically

named AFD members. Making a decision based on a role model would also be considered

logical and conscious decision making because the respondents would ask themselves what their

role model would do before making a decision.

Finally, a few respondents also mentioned training on decision making as a method they

utilized to ensure their decision making was consistent with the AFD values. Reading fire service

periodicals, reviewing AFD standard operating guidelines and memorizing the AFD values were

specifically mentioned.

Research question three: What methods do Austin Fire Department members believe could be

employed to ensure that members make decisions consistent with Austin Fire Department

values?

The survey of AFD department members contained a final question that allowed

respondents to enter any additional comments concerning the AFD values. Several members

submitted recommendations for methods that could be employed to improve the consistency of

decision making in accordance with the AFD values. The methods recommended can be divided

into four categories; modeling of the values by upper management, hiring members with values

similar to the AFD values, providing training for members and making the AFD values more

visible to the department members.

As previously stated, the survey results contained many comments about the distrust and

perceived lack of value-based decision making by the AFD upper management. Many

respondents suggested that the chief officers of the department should set the example for how to

make decisions according to the AFD values. This includes holding those who do not act

consistent with the AFD values accountable for their actions. The many comments such as "there

is an extreme lack of integrity in upper management" and "lies and deception have put this

department in an us versus them mentality" indicate a department-wide perception that the AFD upper management is not held to the same set of values.

Other members suggested that AFD should employ practices that ensure new members already have the same values as the department when they are hired. Comments supporting this method include; "look for these values when recruiting individuals", "these values should be evaluated prior to being hired" and "when hiring new employees, ensure that they understand the values of the department and are willing to abide by them."

Other comments indicated the need for training current members on the AFD values. Suggestions were made to conduct values or leadership training in the cadet academy, the professional development program, the continuing education program and for chief officers. Two respondents suggested that a discontinued department leadership training program be reinstituted. Another respondent suggested that battalion chiefs regularly conduct values training with their personnel.

Finally, several respondents provided recommendations that would make the AFD values more visible to department members. One respondent suggested that "these values be posted at every station in a place of honor." Another respondent recommended that the department print the AFD values on commemorative t-shirts. A similar recommendation was to require a reading of the AFD values before all department meetings. The overall objective of these types of suggestions was to increase the awareness of the AFD values among department members.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

The results of this research are consistent with much of the literature on this topic. A main theme from the results of the survey is the agreement members felt for the AFD values because those values are similar to their own personal values. This is supported by the literature

which predicted that it is very difficult to change a long-held personal value. Additionally, the fact that personal values are often accompanied by strong emotions was evident in many of the comments submitted by the members (Stowell, 2007). The fact that 90 percent of the respondents rated the AFD values overall as important or very important and only 3 percent rated the AFD values as not important is strong evidence that the AFD members agree with the values the department has chosen.

Another reason for their strong agreement with the AFD values is their belief in the fire service traditional values. As with most fire fighters, AFD members have been taught from the start of their career in the fire service that they must have certain values to be a successful fire fighter. These values include integrity, courage and moral character. Members of the public and coworkers depend on fire fighters upholding these values (IFSTA, 2008). Although less than eight percent of the respondents felt that they had received a lot of training on decision making utilizing the AFD values, many comments indicated that they had learned the fire service traditional values at some point in their career. This can be seen in comments such as "that is the duty of a fire fighter" and "if our fire fighters do not have these values, they should not be here." Even the members who suggested that AFD utilize different values still recommended similar traditional fire service values such as honesty, caring, accountability, and professionalism.

The results of this research illustrates that the AFD selection of the values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage accurately reflects the traditional values of the fire service which the majority of the members of the department strongly identify with and consider their own personal values. AFD has successfully accomplished identifying a core value system as suggested by Wallace (2006).

This research also revealed a strong connection between the AFD values and decision making of the department members. The literature stated that decision making is the process of making choices and that these choices are based on a value system. When an individual makes a decision, he or she often subconsciously makes decisions consistent with their personal values (Ward, 2006). Therefore, if the majority of the AFD members strongly agree with the AFD values, it would be expected that the majority of members make decisions consistent with the AFD values and often do so subconsciously. Almost 90 percent of the department members said that they make decisions consistent with the AFD values. However, the decision making consistent with AFD values was slightly less while off duty. This can be explained by the fact that members may feel less responsibility to uphold the fire service values when not in uniform. However, this small difference between on-duty and off-duty decision making supports the fact that most AFD members hold the same values as the AFD values and therefore make decisions consistent with those values most of the time no matter the circumstances.

This method of decision making is consistent with the research of Klein (1999) which found that people make decisions based on their past successful experiences and that most decision making does not require a person to complete the several steps of the rational decision-making models. However, when asked if the AFD values were consciously utilized before making a decision on an emergency scene, 65 members responded that they always do. It is highly unlikely that fire fighters on an emergency scene always consciously compare their options with the AFD values before making a decision. Klein's research specifically found that fire ground commanders do not make decisions in this manner (Klein, 1999). A lack of understanding the differences between the rational and recognition-primed decision-making processes may be one possible explanation for the high number of respondents who said they

always consciously utilize the AFD values before making a decision on an emergency scene. The research did find support for recognition-primed decision-making process in many of the comments submitted such as "I don't go down a mental checklist of the values when making a decision" and "these values come naturally." Although the survey contained questions that were designed to differentiate between the two models of decision making, the results did not contain the distinctions expected. This could have been caused by survey instructions and questions that were not clear enough for the respondents to understand or it could indicate a need for training on decision-making models for AFD members to understand the differences.

The literature review found examples of how to use the rational method of decision making consistent with values such as the decision guidelines proposed by Carter (2008). Although this research did not find any AFD member using the guidelines written by Carter, others guidelines such as religious beliefs, department values, codes of honor and department procedures were cited as being utilized for guides in decision making. Although some members listed AFD policies as being utilized for decision making, the literature review did not find information concerning the AFD values or how to make decisions according to the AFD values in the AFD policies. Specifically, AFD General Order H37 Code of Conduct (2008) lists actions that are not acceptable but not what values are desired. This could be considered an indication of a rule-driven organization as described by Wallace (2006).

Another common rational decision-making guide used by AFD members is the consideration of what decision a role model would make in the same situation. According to Buckman, (2006) the fire chief must be beyond reproach concerning the values in order to hold the other members accountable. Additionally, Bruegman (2009) believes that the fire chief must set the example for all department members concerning acting according to the values of the

department. This is an area of significant conflict between the research results and the literature review. This research found a wide-held belief among AFD members that the fire chief and the AFD command staff do not act according to the AFD values. This research was not designed to determine if this belief is actually factual or just the perception of many members. No matter which is true, an obvious fact is that a significant portion of the AFD membership does not view the fire chief and the command staff as role models for the AFD values. According to the literature, this will have a negative impact on the department members' ability to make the right decisions and act according to the AFD values. It will also make it difficult for the department to hold members accountable for actions inconsistent with the AFD values (Bruegman, 2009).

One recommended method to ensure that members are aware of the department values and can be held accountable for not acting in accordance with these values is to implement a values training program (Ward, 2006). Klein (1999) further recommends decision-making exercises and the use of stories to demonstrate the decision-making process that is desired by the department. Although some members entered comments in the survey recommending that AFD provide training concerning the AFD values and decision making, most of the department members stated that they have received little to no training on this topic.

The literature supported the hiring of employees that share the values of the organization (Ward, 2006). This method was also recommended by several AFD members. Comments that support this method include "look for these values when recruiting individuals", "these values should be evaluated prior to being hired" and "when hiring new employees, ensure that they understand the values of the department and are willing to abide by them."

In summary, the results of this research were mostly consistent with information found in the literature review. When considering how to ensure members make decisions consistent with

the department values, factors such as ensuring that the department values are similar to the

members' personal values, having leaders within the department model the values and providing

methods for members to make decisions in accordance with the values are all very important.

This research has indicated some difficulties that AFD has in ensuring members act according to

department values. Most evident is the perception that the upper management does not model the

expected values. The organizational impact of this one issue can be summed up by the survey

comment "if AFD command staff could show me how to apply their values by their actions, then

maybe I would have more buy-in." An organization without employee buy-in on the chosen

values is an organization with morale and behavior problems (Arena, 2007).

<div align="center">Recommendations</div>

The results of this research can be used to make recommendations for achieving the goal

of ensuring that AFD members make decisions consistent with the AFD values. First, AFD

should clearly communicate one set of AFD values. The research demonstrated that the majority

of AFD members strongly agree with the values the department has chosen. There is no evidence

that AFD should change the currently selected values. However, several comments indicate

confusion about which values are the current AFD values. Some work locations still contain

materials that list previous AFD values which are different than the current AFD values. To

eliminate this confusion, AFD should locate and remove all outdated AFD values material. Next,

AFD should ensure all work locations have the current AFD values posted. Also, other means of

ensuring clear communications of the AFD values should be considered such as placing the

values on the department's intranet site or printing them on commemorative t-shirts.

After ensuring the AFD values are clearly communicated, AFD should include a method

in the department's hiring process to ensure new members hold similar values. The research and

literature review both demonstrated a strong correlation between employees acting according to organization values when they hold similar values. Further research would be needed to determine what hiring procedures would best identify the values of potential new employees.

To provide methods for members to make decisions consistent with the AFD values, AFD should implement a values training program. The research indicated a confusion concerning the decision-making processes and a lack of commonly used methods for making value-based decisions. Therefore, the training program should first consist of training on decision-making processes and the models used in different situations. Once the members understand the difference in decision-making processes, they can be provided with training to ensure that they make decisions consistent with the AFD values. For time-sensitive, emergency scene type decisions, departmental stories of successful past decisions and decision-making exercises can be utilized to improve the members' recognition-primed decision-making skills. For important decisions that allow for logical deliberation, members can be trained to utilize guidelines that ensure decisions are made consistent with AFD values. AFD should also provide guidelines and training for members utilizing the rational decision-making process. This could include methods such as utilizing the LDRSHIP acronym to assist in recalling the AFD values to ensure the decision is consistent with them. As the research proved, most members have not memorized the AFD values. This simple acronym can be used to ensure the values are remembered and utilized similar to the RECEO VS acronym used for fire ground tactical decision making. In addition, value-based decision-making guidelines should be added to the AFD policy manual. The overall goal should be to provide members with value guidelines to allow them the freedom to make decisions as long as they are consistent with the AFD values.

This revision of policy may also include the removal of rules that unnecessarily restrict the discretion of members.

Finally, AFD must address the perception that the fire chief and command staff does not model the department values. Because this research was not designed to determine if this perception was factual or not, further research needs be conducted to ascertain the causes of this wide-held departmental belief. Then, recommendations to correct this problem may be developed. No matter what is the true cause of this perception, this research and literature review both strongly suggest that for AFD to expect its members to follow the AFD values, the members must believe that the fire chief and the command staff are held to the same standard and are considered role models for the AFD values.

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Appendix A

Austin Fire Department Values Survey

Page 1. Austin Fire Department Values

The Austin Fire Department is evaluating the current department values and their role in decision making. All personnel are encouraged to provide feedback on the department values by completing a short ten question survey. This information will be used to determine the effectiveness of the current department values and for developing future training programs.

PLEASE READ THE INSTRUCTIONS AT THE TOP OF EACH PAGE BEFORE ENTERING YOUR CHOICES.

1. Can you state the seven AFD values from memory?

Yes / No

2. How much training have you received on making decisions consistent with AFD values?

None / A little / Some / A lot / Not sure

Page 2. AFD Values

The seven values of the Austin Fire Department are (LDRSHIP):

Loyalty – Bear true faith and allegiance to the citizens you serve, the Austin Fire Department, your unit, and fellow fire fighters.

Duty – Fulfill your obligations.

Respect – Treat people as they should be treated.

Selfless Service – Put the welfare of the citizens you serve, the Austin Fire Department, and your subordinates before your own.

Honor – Live up to all the Austin Fire Department values.

Integrity – Do what's right – legally and morally.

Personal Courage – Face fear, danger, or adversity (physical or moral).

3. Please rate the importance of each AFD value. (You must give a rating to each of the values to successfully complete this question. The comments section is optional.)

Loyalty

No Opinion / Not Important / Somewhat Important / Important / Very Important

Duty

No Opinion / Not Important / Somewhat Important / Important / Very Important

Respect

No Opinion / Not Important / Somewhat Important / Important / Very Important

Selfless Service

No Opinion / Not Important / Somewhat Important / Important / Very Important

Honor

No Opinion / Not Important / Somewhat Important / Important / Very Important

Integrity

No Opinion / Not Important / Somewhat Important / Important / Very Important

Personal Courage

No Opinion / Not Important / Somewhat Important / Important / Very Important

Page 3. Decision Making

The statements on this page will assess how consistently you make decision with the AFD values.

4. I make decisions that are consistent with AFD values during emergency incidents.

Not sure / not applicable / Never / Sometimes/ Usually / Most of the time /Always

5. I make decisions that are consistent with AFD values during non-emergency time at the station/office.

Not sure / Never / Sometimes/ Usually / Most of the time /Always

6. I make decisions that are consistent with AFD values while off duty.

Not sure / Never / Sometimes/ Usually / Most of the time /Always

Page 4. Use of Values for Decision Making

The statements on this page will assess how often you consciously utilize the AFD values when making a decision. This is different from just making a decision consistent with AFD values in

that you must consciously delay your decision making until you think about the AFD values and then make your decision.

7. I consciously utilize the AFD values before making a decision during emergency incidents.

Not sure / not applicable / Never / Sometimes/ Usually / Most of the time /Always

8. I consciously utilize the AFD values before making a decision during non-emergency time at the station/office.

Not sure / Never / Sometimes/ Usually / Most of the time /Always

9. I consciously utilize the AFD values before making a decision while off duty.

Not sure / Never / Sometimes/ Usually / Most of the time /Always

10. Please describe any method that you utilize to ensure that you make decisions consistent with the AFD values.

11. Please enter any other comments that you would like to add concerning the AFD values.

Appendix B

Austin Fire Department Information Bulletin

INFORMATION BULLETIN   **DISPOSAL DATE:**
                                                                      August 31, 2009

TO: All AFD Personnel

FROM: Harry Evans, Special Projects Battalion Chief

DATE: August 7, 2009

SUBJECT: AFD Values Survey

The Austin Fire Department is evaluating the current department values and their role in decision making by members. All personnel are encouraged to provide feedback on the department values by completing a short ten question survey. This information will be used to determine the effectiveness of the current department values and for developing future training programs.

Click on this link to take the <u>Austin Fire Department Values Survey</u>. The survey will be closed on August 31st.

Approved for distribution: Assistant Chief Richard Davis